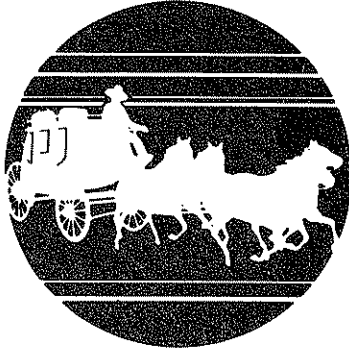


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KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Certification of State Register Listing

The Register of Historic Kansas Places includes all Kansas properties nominated to the National Register as well as lower threshold properties which are listed on the state register only.

Property Name: Oakwood Farms

Address: 2449 NE Sherman Road and 2521 NE Sherman Road, Topeka, Kansas 66617

County: Shawnee County

Legal: See attached sheet

Owner: Martin Jones, Carol and Omar Jones

Address: 2449 NE Sherman Road and 2521 NE Sherman Road, Topeka, Kansas 66617

National Register eligible _____

State Register eligible X

This property was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on May 2, 1992.

I hereby certify that this property is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.

Ramon Powers
State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

May 2, 1992

The nominated property contains 156.2 acres in the NE fractional 1/4 and the SE fractional 1/4 of S14, T11, R16E in Soldier Township, Shawnee County, Kansas. The property is comprised of two separately identified tracts of 120.8 acres and 35.4 acres. These tracts are contiguous and historically associated.

The 120.8 acre tract shall be identified as Tract Number One. The 35.4 acre tract shall be identified as Tract Number Two.

Tract Number One contains Gov't lot 1 and beg. inter of S line Gov't lot 1 and W line Hwy 4 the S 10 (S), E 20 (S), S 915 (S), SW 190 (S), NW 210 (S), W 410 (S), N 420 (S), E 765 (S) to POB less S 808 (S) of W 774 of Gov't lot 1 and less R/W.

Tract Number Two beg inter E/L Kaw Res 7 and N/L Hwy 24, N 1526 (S), E 754, S 1228.58, E 410, S 660 (S), NWLY 500 (S), NW 730 (S) to POB.

Oakwood Farm is located in extreme eastern Shawnee County, mostly north of present day U. S. Highway 24, and just west of Kansas Highway 4. Today, 156 acres of the original 177 acre farm remain, 21 acres being taken through the years for railroad and various highway expansion projects. Oakwood Farm is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places for its historical association with Kansas nurserymen Lewis R. Taylor and his son Egbert R. Taylor.

THE TAYLOR ERA

The next chapter in the life of Oakwood Farm begins in 1869. In that year another pioneering family from the east decided to relocate to Kansas to take advantage of the promises the new land had to offer. This family would shape Oakwood Farm for the next 85 years. In addition, and perhaps most significantly, the family would literally plant the first seeds that would grow into an industry having major significance on both a local and national level.

Lewis Taylor was born into a family of 12 children in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in about 1840. His father, William D. Taylor had been active in the nursery business in Pennsylvania for many years. When Lewis was about 14 years old, he went to work for Mr. George Peters. Mr. Peters was a contemporary of Lewis' father and was also a successful nurseryman in the Pennsylvania and Ohio areas. Here, Taylor would learn the business that he would practice for the rest of his life. He worked for the nursery in Arndstville and Gettysburg and then moved to the Peters' nursery in the Troy and New Carlisle, Ohio areas. (This nursery was operated under the name Fairmont Nurseries, Troy Ohio.) While working here, Taylor would meet and marry Sarah Ellen Egbert in 1856. Taylor continued working in the nursery and Sarah taught school. On March 22, 1867 their first child, a daughter named Winona Lee was born. Shortly after this, an event would occur which would change the Taylor's lives forever. Mr. Taylor's brother-in-law (husband of Isabella Taylor) had made a trip to Kansas and returned to the Ohio area with glowing reports of the new state. Based on these reports, Lewis and Sarah, decided to move to Kansas, with their 2 year old daughter Winona, in 1869. Winona Taylor Johnson, who died in 1970 at the age of 103, recalled that her father had sold all his possessions, left the nursery business in New Carlisle, Ohio, and moved his family there because his brother-in-law was "so taken with the beauty and promise" of the area that he was persuaded to move to Kansas. They arrived in Topeka in August of 1869 and after a brief stay in the city, the little family moved to a small log cabin in the woods south of the Union Pacific tracks on the banks of the Kaw River just east of the Shawnee County/Jefferson County line. (This would be just southeast of the Oakwood Farm property.) Here in this

little log cabin, the Taylor's would have their second child, a daughter, Mable, in 1870. (Johnson, personal interview, 1967)

By a twist of fate, the Taylor family had arrived in the vicinity of Oakwood Farm at about the time the Kuykendall's decided to leave Kansas. Lewis Taylor was so taken with the Oakwood Farm property that he purchased the farm from the three Kuykendall brothers (James Marion, William and Robert) on June 16, 1870 and the family moved into the log house which had been built to serve as the Calhoun County courthouse. Winona Taylor Johnson recalled that the building had two large downstairs rooms and two sleeping rooms upstairs with a porch along the front. The old Kuykendall place was located just east of the old courthouse. Just north of the courthouse was a smaller wooden building of two rooms which had formerly been used as slave quarters. The slave quarters were heated by a fire place and the courthouse was heated by a single stove. The Taylor's used the old courthouse for sleeping and living quarters and used the small "slave quarters" as a kitchen and dining room. It was in the log courthouse that the Taylor's third child, a son named Egbert Ross was born in 1871. (Johnson, personal interview, 1967)

Lewis Taylor began farming operations at Oakwood Farm shortly after he purchased the property. By this time several of Lewis's brothers (Samuel and Joseph) had also moved to Kansas, settling in and around the Grantville area.

Winona Taylor Johnson recalled that the family's early years on Oakwood Farm were often very trying. She was fond of saying - "We lived the first year on the farm on Faith, the second on Hope and the third on Charity." She recalled that one Sunday morning when she and her sister played on the kitchen floor as her mother bathed her tiny baby brother, she looked up to see two Indians, their noses pressed against the window, watching them. The Indians then proceeded to come in the door and then sit down by the stove. Once seated, they began to clean their toes and they requested that her mother bake them some biscuits. Fortunately her father and Uncle Samuel, who had been out taking a Sunday morning stroll, returned and the Indians promptly left. This was her only recollection of seeing Indians on the property.

She recalled many pleasant and not-so-pleasant memories living in the log building as a little girl. There were severe storms, late freezes, visits of relatives from the east and then, the serious grasshopper plague of 1874. This event so seriously discouraged the family that they decided to move back to Ohio for several years.

When the family returned to New Carlisle, Ohio, Lewis Taylor went back to work as a foreman for the Peters' nursery. It was here that the Taylor's final child, a daughter named Ada Faye was born on April 1, 1876. After several years of again working in the nursery business, Taylor was persuaded by his father-in-law (a practicing physician) to enroll in medical school. He entered medical school in Cincinnati but, after two years, he decided that medicine was not for him. He wanted to be outdoors and he wanted to grow things. The lure of the nursery business and Kansas was too much for Lewis and he decided to return to Oakwood Farm and try his hand at what he knew best. (Johnson, personal interview, 1967)

Lewis Taylor and his family returned to Oakwood Farm in early 1879 and with him he literally brought the seeds that would spell his future success and would fuel a new industry for the town of Topeka and the surrounding area for many years to come. In the spring of 1880, Lewis Taylor tried a horticultural experiment

which proved to be a tremendous success. In that spring he planted apple seeds which he had brought with him from Ohio in order to see how the seeds would grow in the Kaw River valley soil. Taylor soon found that the conditions in the valley were ideal for growing apple seedlings and apple trees.

Until Taylor discovered that the Kaw valley was perfect for apple seedlings and trees, New York state was the leading producer of this type of nursery stock. That quickly changed after Taylor's experiments. Taylor's discovery in the early 1880's was described years later in a report on the apple seedling industry which appeared in the Twenty-third Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture. This report was published in 1923 and was written by Lewis Taylor's son Egbert who, by that time, was widely recognized as a leader in the nursery industry. This report notes:

"It was discovered years ago that the Kansas apple-tree grower had a marked advantage over his New York competitor. The Kansas grower could produce a good five- to seven-foot merchantable tree in two years, while the eastern grower required three and even four in some cases, to produce the same-sized tree. Moreover, the fast growing tree of Kansas was much smoother and more desirable than the tree of the East. The Kaw valley had an enviable reputation for fine apple trees as far back as the early eighties. Large nurseries sprang up, and many growers devoted their entire time to the apple tree and the apple seedlings."

The report went on to describe the first planting done by Taylor in 1880:

"The growing of apple seedlings for the general trade was started in a very small way in the Kaw valley in the spring of 1880. Previous to this time seedlings of inferior quality had been grown in many different states. For the first few years only a few bushels of seed were planted. The planting was done with small drills which held a gallon of seed. The drill was filled at the end of the row and pushed down to a sack placed at the right distance, where it was refilled. It was then pushed down to another sack, and so on. Following the drill came a man with a wheel hoe, which covered the seed to the desired depth. This process was a slow and expensive mode of planting. The rows were planted three and one-half feet apart and cultivated with a regular two-horse cultivator. It was soon found that we could produce seedlings superior to any others in the country, and the demand for Kansas seedlings increased by leaps and bounds. The Kansas grower invented new labor-saving machinery for planting, cultivating and digging the seedlings. He was soon able to grow seedlings cheaper than elsewhere." (Kansas State Board of Agriculture - Biennial Report, 1923, pgs. 157 & 159)

The industry and Taylor's part in its inception was also recalled in a newspaper article which appeared in the Topeka State Journal in 1910:

"Kansas City, Mo., Dec. 16.--From a small start a little more than a quarter of a century ago, near Topeka, the seedling apple industry has grown to such proportions that this year it is estimated the growers between St. Marys, Kan., on the west, and Lawrence, Kan., on the east, will sell more than 30,000,000 seedling apple trees. That this figure will be increased gradually until more than twice the number will be raised annually is the opinion of J. H. Skinner of Topeka, retiring president of the Western Nurserymen's association, which last night closed a two days' session at the Coates house." [J. H. Skinner was also a pioneer Kaw valley nurseryman in his own rite.]

"I don't know why the Kaw valley should be any better suited to the raising of apple seedlings than any other section of the United States," said Mr. Skinner, "but it is a fact we have an industry, the largest of its kind in the world."

"Seedling apple trees are shipped from this little valley of the Kaw over a territory extending from Maine to Washington and from Michigan to Florida and Texas. Every part of the United states draws in part, at least, for seedling apple trees on the Kaw valley."

"The industry had its inception at Topeka more than twenty five years ago when Taylor and Peters, pioneer nurserymen, put out some apple seeds in the alluvial soil. The seedlings did well. Others tried the experiment and now there is nursery after nursery, all of seedling apples." (Topeka State Journal, December 17, 1910.

The start of the business was also chronicled in an article recounting the apple seedling industry in Shawnee County which appeared in the Shawnee County Historical Society's 15th Bulletin in December of 1951:

"The success and fame of Shawnee county in the seedling business were, in the beginning, the personal achievements of the Taylor family, led by Mr. Taylor's father, Lewis R. Taylor, who came here first, and his brothers Joseph C., John W. and Samuel, natives of Gettysburg, Pa. where their father, before them was an apple-tree man. The father, William D. Taylor, had mastered the secrets of producing apple seedlings in the hills whence Johnny Appleseed had taken to the wilderness, and his sons had peddled trees to Pennsylvania and Maryland farmers before Lewis, the eldest came to Kansas. Here, in 1869, he bought the land on which stood the abandoned Calhoun County court house. Its site is on the same rise of ground and only a couple of hundred yards from his son's [Egbert's] front porch.

Before Lewis R. Taylor got into the seedling business the grasshopper years of the 70's sent him back to Pennsylvania where there was more to eat. But he kept the land and returned to it in 1879. The beginning of the seedling industry here can be dated from about 1880." (Shawnee County Historical Society Bulletin Number 15, December 1951, p. 25)

An additional article which appeared in the Topeka Daily Capital in 1909 also recounted the beginning of the nursery business and apple-seedling industry:

"The nursery business of Topeka dates far back into the early seventies , and even a local firm or two into the latter sixties.

L. R. Taylor, formerly from Pennsylvania, and later from Ohio, came to this state in 68 and bought the farm upon which was located the old town of Calhoun, named after John C. Calhoun, a town of lots without a building. His fine country residence stands today above the valley on this "Oakwood" farm just east of the bluffs.

After a few years absence, spent in Ohio and Indiana, he returned and established a wholesale nursery just east of the Santa Fe shops on Seward avenue before there was a Seward avenue.

During the '80s he did a large business in a wholesale way. The business was done through companies of tree men, the wholesale bill of some companies sometimes amounting to \$10,000.00 in a single packing." (Topeka Daily Capital, February 28, 1990, p.90) [Interestingly enough, this article was written by State Senator Alanson L. Brooke. Little did he know that some 50 years later the majority of the Oakwood Farm property which he described would be purchased by his granddaughter and her husband, Carol and Omar Jones.]

According to Winona Taylor Johnson, the family stayed at Oakwood Farm from 1879 through 1881. It was here that Lewis Taylor first planted his nursery stock on the farm's bottom ground near the river. By 1881, the fledgling nursery business had outgrown the bottom ground on the farm property. More bottom ground was needed for the raising of nursery stock. Lewis initially rented some bottom ground south of what would become Seward Avenue, three blocks east of the Sante Fe shops. Lewis moved his family to a little house in town in order to be closer to the nursery grounds. (Johnson, personal interview, 1967)

In addition to his work with apple seedlings, Taylor experimented with a variety of other nursery stock as well. There is evidence of that he did early work with grapes, cherries, pears, peaches, plums, and ornamental stock as well. There is also evidence that he kept a close working relationship with Mr. Peters of Ohio during his early years in the wholesale business. Mr. Taylor's great-granddaughter, Jane Banta Abernathy still has in her possession original agreements between Lewis Taylor and George Peters signed in March of 1882 which deal with the production of apple seedlings and trees as well as grapes and cherries. For a time in the mid-eighties the business operated under the name of the Taylor-Peters Nursery.

Lewis Taylor's success and growth in the nursery business continued. He eventually purchased the ground south of Seward Avenue and established the nursery's office there. He also purchased bottom ground directly north of what would become the Potwin area in Topeka. The nursery continued to grow. Others, noting Taylor's success, also began nurseries in the area. J. H. Skinner began his nursery in about 1890 and F. W. Watson began his nursery in about 1894. Yet others also joined into the nursery stock business during the late 1890's. By the end of the century, the industry started by Taylor had become extremely significant to the town of Topeka and the Kaw River valley.

Oakwood Farm played a significant part in the growth of the business and it continued to be an important part of Lewis Taylor's life. In addition to some nursery stock, the farm was used to produce grain and hay which was used to fuel the large number of horses required to operate the nursery. The family continued to spend a great deal of time there through the 1880's.

By 1892, Lewis Taylor's success in the nursery business enabled him to begin work on a permanent residence on the Oakwood Farm property. Today, a hundred years later, this distinguished country home, which sits high on a hill and is nestled between many beautiful oaks and maple trees, is still the centerpiece of Oakwood Farm and is a widely known area landmark. The home was completed in 1895 and the Taylor's relocated to their new home on the farm. [A complete description of the home can be found in the third section of this nomination.]

Also in 1892, Lewis's son Egbert, who was 21 years old by that time, officially joined his father's business. By this time the business was operating under the name of L. R. Taylor and Sons, Topeka Nurseries. The

nursery continued to meet with success and continued to grow. Under Lewis and Egbert, the firm continued expansion of the raising of general nursery stock and they met with continued exceptional success with apple seedlings and trees.

On January 1, 1895, Egbert Taylor married Elizabeth Rodgers and the couple moved into a home at 1315 Western Street in Topeka to begin their married life together. Here the family would raise their three children- Raymond Ross Taylor (1895-1937), Sarah Augusta Taylor (born in 1898 and still living), and Lewis Rodgers Taylor (1900-1931).

By shortly after the turn on the century the nursery business was widely recognized as a major industry in the Topeka area. The apple seedling industry in the Kaw Valley had grown to the point that it was the largest producer of this type of nursery stock in the United States. Numerous articles have appeared detailing the development of this industry into a world leader. [Copies of many of these articles appear in the reference section at the end of this nomination. These articles detail the business, the effect on the local economy, growing methods employed, etc.] By 1915 the Kaw valley apple seedling producers were shipping millions of the trees annually and were supplying nearly all of the major retail nursery outlets in the United States. The Kaw Valley district extending from Wamego to Lawrence became the center for the greatest apple seedling business in the world. It was widely estimated that this little area was supplying ninety percent of the seedlings of the United States. While many firms engaged in the business, the Taylor firm remained on of the largest in the valley. The three main producers of apple seedlings by this time were the Taylors, J. H. Skinner and F. W. Watson, with Watson, who grew nothing but apple seedlings, being the largest producer of this stock.

Sometime after the turn of the century and before 1915, Lewis Taylor had turned the day to day operations of the nursery over to his son Egbert and he settled down to a well earned retirement on the farm. The 1915 Kansas census records list Lewis and Sarah (who would have been in their mid-70's at that time) as being retired. Also in that year, Oakwood Farm is listed as having 5 horses, 3 milkcows, 21 other cattle, 5 swine and 1 dog. The farm had 1 cream separator and produced 50 pounds of butter during the year. The home was also listed as having a home library with 30 volumes.

On October 18, 1918, Lewis Taylor, the pioneer nurseryman and founder of the apple seedling industry in the Kaw Valley, died in the home he had built on Oakwood Farm. His obituary read:

"TAYLOR---The funeral of Lewis Taylor, one of the early residents of the county, who died at the family home, Oakwood farm, east of Calhoun bluffs, will be held today with burial in Rochester cemetery. The services will be held at Oakwood farm. Mr Taylor was born in Gettysburg, Pa., and heard Lincoln's Gettysburg address. He was married to Sarah Ellen Egbert, in Xenia, Ind., and came to Kansas in 1869. In that year he bought the farm on which he has lived ever since, and where he raised his family. The Taylor farm is one of the well known places of Shawnee county and is known to all motorists of Topeka. The home stands above the road, on the east edge of Calhoun bluffs. Mr. Taylor was dean of the nursery business in this part of the state. The Taylor family lived for some time in the log court house on the family farm, which was at one time the Calhoun court house. The Taylor farm was, before Mr. Taylor bought it, surveyed as the site of Calhoun City, which was to have been the capital city of Kansas. For some time there seems to have been some plan of calling what is now Shawnee county, Calhoun county. There are still the cornerstones on

the Taylor farm of the site of Calhoun City. Mr. Taylor is survived by his widow and by three daughters, Mrs. W. H. Johnson, 314 Greenwood, Mrs. A. K. Van Hook, 127 Clay, Mrs. O. J. Bowman, Denver, Colo. and by a son, E. R. Taylor, 1315 Western." (Topeka Daily Capital, October 22, 1918)

After Lewis Taylor's death, the farm was left to his eldest daughter, Winona Taylor Johnson. Lewis's wife Sarah continued to live at the farm for another year or two longer and then went to live with Winona and her husband W. H. Johnson at their home in Topeka. Sarah passed away on November 11th, 1929.

In 1920 Egbert purchased Oakwood Farm from his sister and he moved his family into the large country home which his father had built. He continued to actively influence the nursery business in the area for the next 30 years. In a 1954 article which appeared in the Topeka Daily Capital, Egbert's activities in the nursery business were recalled:

"By the 1920's tho, the business had been rebuilt [from the 1903 flood which had a tremendous detrimental effect on the nursery business of the Kaw valley] to the point that Taylor was raising 15 million apple seedlings per season and shipping them to many places in the United States and abroad. He shipped them to south America, Mexico and Canada, with requests from as far away as Czechoslovakia.

Some seasons the firm planted as high as 160 bushels of apple seed [Each bushel of seed contained on the average 750,000 seeds which would produce from 100,000 to 150,000 marketable seedlings. An acre of ground was needed for each bushel of seeds planted.] - all imported from France. Taylor also grew thousands of pear seedlings, importing the seed from Japan. At one time 160 boys were employed to work in the large nurseries.

During his long years of raising apple seedlings, Taylor maintained nurseries up and down the Kaw valley. A 1938-39 catalog issued by the firm shows that he had operated nurseries at Silver Lake, Rossville, Topeka, and Grantville. Since apple seedlings will not grow year after year in the same land, it was necessary to move the nurseries each season. [It was noted in a 1915 article that the nurseries "paid the high rent of \$10 per acre" for the river bottom ground.]

One of his most unusual shipping problems occurred when Taylor began sending seedlings to South America, he said. Since the South American growing seasons are opposite of those in the United States (winter in South America when it is summer here and vice versa), he had to devise a shipping method thru which the seedlings would not freeze leaving the United States or overheat while crossing the equator.

He finally settled it by shipping his seedlings by express to the coast and by refrigerated ship compartments to South America. [Taylor had also be instrumental in developing special boxes for shipping perishable, live seedlings to all points of the world.]

In addition to apple seedlings he also raised a complete fruit stock, including cherry, apricot and plum seedlings. (Topeka Daily Capital, March 14, 1954, p. 19A)

In the early 1920's, Egbert Taylor was asked by the Kansas State Board of Agriculture to prepare an article on the apple seedling and tree industry that his father had started in Kansas and which the Taylor family had

perfected. Egbert's article was published in the Board of Agriculture's Twenty-third Biennial Report in 1923. At this point, the production of apple seedlings had reached its peak. This article states:

"The most exclusive of all specialists in the nursery business is the grower of apple seedlings. The growing of these seedlings has reached its perfection in the Kaw valley. The success has been so phenomenal here that the growing in other sections has practically ceased, and fully 90 percent of this important stock, both in the United States and in Canada, is grown here in the Kaw valley." (This article gives a complete and detailed account of the industry and a copy is included in its entirety in the reference section at the end of this nomination.)

By this time the Taylor Nurseries normally had about 300 to 500 acres of land in cultivation. Of this about 160 acres were planted in apple seedlings. Usually about 80 acres was planted in corn (a good deal of which was grown on the Oakwood Farm property) to feed the many horses required to run the nurseries. The balance of the acreage was planted in a wide variety of crops and other nursery stock.

As noted previously, Oakwood Farm played an integral part in the operations of the Taylor nurseries. Kansas census records for 1925 indicate that the farm had 30 acres planted in corn, 15 acres planted in oats, 20 acres in alfalfa and 60 acres of prairie grass for hay. Nearly all of this was used for the horses in the nursery operation. On the farm property itself there were 7 horses, 2 mules, 4 milk cows and 7 other cattle. (The census records did not have provisions to record land on the farm in nursery stock being grown for sale, but personal interviews and early aerial photographs indicate that 10 to 20 acres on the farm were usually planted in nursery stock.)

Success of the apple seedling industry continued until the 1930's. At that time the country was changing and the demand for apples began to decrease. The industry eventually withered and died. The Fifteenth Bulletin of the Shawnee County Historical Society which was published in December of 1951, chronicled the demise of the apple seedling industry:

"One day last month Mr. [Egbert] Taylor sat in the comfortable living room of his Calhoun Bluffs farm home and ruminated upon this vanished glory.

"The disappearance of the seedling industry from this valley, I suppose," said he, "dates from the depression of the 1930's. At the time I wrote that article [the article Egbert had written in 1923 for the Kansas State Board of Agriculture noted above] we Kaw valley growers had reached the top of the divide. For several years we enjoyed a hard earned prosperity while contending with all the problems inherent in a highly specialized type of farming. An area of from 500 to a maximum of 1000 acres between Wamego and Perry, in the rich bottom lands along the Kaw, was producing up to a hundred million seedling trees a year. We shipped them all over the United States and Canada and a few as far away as Uruguay. But there was a descent along the road ahead of us. The collapse of business of the '30's pushed us down it rapidly."

"For one thing, the apple business in the volcanic soil of Oregon and Washington with their favorable climate, had become well established and their nurseries were flourishing. The freight truck eliminated delays in delivery of a perishable commodity which often suffered in rail transportation. State inspection regulations

had long complicated the grower's selling problems; but most of all, I think, the rise of the citrus fruit industry was changing the appetites of the American people causing apple growers to abandon their orchards. And now the candy-bar and the fruit juice can have completed the revolution."

"So today, nobody is growing apple seedlings on any important scale in this or many other parts of the country, except the Pacific northwest. It is a vanished industry here."

While competition of other fruits, state regulations, insect pests and favorable climatic conditions elsewhere, with changes in human factors, all contributed to the decline of the seedling business in Kansas, the change in the American school-boy's appetite would seem, as Mr. Taylor points out, also to have been a factor in this vanished industry's ills. If they paid, apples would doubtless be grown as widely as they used to be, but a comparison of their market price with the soaring prices of other familiar fruits is evidence that the American boy no longer carries them to school.

He is eating a candy-bar---and leaving the wrapper on your lawn." (Shawnee County Historical Bulletin Number 15, December 1951, pgs. 25 & 26)

In 1950, at the age of 79, after having spent 58 years in the business which his father had begun, Egbert Taylor retired and sold his interest in the firm to his son-in-law and partner Jay C. Banta (born 1896 and still living; married Sarah Augusta Taylor in 1923). After the 1951 flood, which was devastating to the business, Banta discontinued the wholesale nursery operation.

Egbert's wife, Elizabeth, preceded him in death on September 25th, 1949. Egbert continued living in the large home on Oakwood Farm until his death on October 19, 1955. Egbert's obituary read:

"Egbert R. Taylor, Pioneer, Dies at 84

Egbert R. Taylor, 84, pioneer Shawnee County nurseryman, died Wednesday at his home on Route 3, the same farm where he was born.

He was born August 28, 1871 in a log house, built originally to serve as a county seat for Calhoun County. His father, L. R. Taylor, had moved his nursery business From Pennsylvania to the farm near Topeka in 1869.

It was the first nursery plant in this part of the country and was the beginning of a business that later became one of the world's foremost producers of apple seedlings. In 1892, Egbert Taylor joined his father's firm and was active in the business until he retired in 1950. By the 1920's he was raising 15 million apple seedlings a year and was shipping them to many points in the United States and abroad.

Some seasons as many as 160 bushels of apple seed, imported from France, were planted on the farm, as well as thousands of pear seedlings, imported from Japan. In 1950, he sold his business to his son-in-law, Jay C. Banta. After the 1951 flood, the wholesale business was discontinued.

The log house where he was born was destroyed many years ago and another house was built. Mr. Taylor celebrated his golden wedding anniversary in 1945 on the same farm where his parents had observed their 50th wedding anniversary many years before." (Topeka Daily Capital, October 21, 1955)

After Egbert's death in 1955, Oakwood Farm was willed to his daughter, Sarah Augusta (Taylor) Banta. In the 1930's Augusta and her husband Jay had moved into the farm's carriage house which had been remodeled into a residence and moved to a location just southwest of the large home which Lewis Taylor had built in 1892. In 1956, the large home and a majority of the land was sold to Carol and Omar Jones, keeping the farm somewhat in the family as Carol's mother and Egbert Taylor were first cousins. The Jones' continue living in the home today.

Augusta and Jay Banta continued living in the remodeled carriage house until 1982 when they sold their "carriage house" home and associated property to the Jones' son, Martin. He and his wife Jo Anne occupy the old Oakwood Farm carriage house today. The Banta's, now in their mid 90's are still frequent visitors to Oakwood Farm to this day.

Egbert Taylor's death in 1855 marked the end of a great era in the history of Oakwood Farm. Lewis and Egbert were true pioneers of an important industry for Topeka and the Kaw valley. Their contributions were significant and played a major role in the history of the area. They were entrepreneurs who developed a new industry, which many others followed, and which provided a major economic base for the Topeka area for many years. From nearly the time that Lewis Taylor moved his family to Kansas in 1869 until Egbert's death in 1955, Oakwood Farm played a significant role in the lives and accomplishments of Lewis and Egbert. To this day, Oakwood Farm's historic character continues to convey its significant association with these pioneers.

THE FARM HOME

As noted in an earlier section of this nomination, Lewis Taylor began construction of a large country home situated high on the crest of a hill on the east end of what is known as Calhoun Bluffs in 1892. Construction of the home continued until the winter of 1895-96 when the upper stories were completed. When finished the home was a beautiful representation of the architecture and construction of the late Victorian period. The home was placed in a magnificent setting among by the many beautiful maple and oak trees of the surrounding farm. Today the home remains much the same as when it was completed nearly 100 years ago. As in Lewis and Egbert Taylor's days, this large home remains the centerpiece of Oakwood Farm and a well recognized and known area landmark.

The home is a balloon-framed, wood structure which would best be classified as a sedate example of the Queen Anne style of architecture. This style was popular in the late 19th century when the home was under construction. Many of the home's features are representative of this style.

The home's distinctive exterior features are a hipped roof with front and cross gables; a huge 14-pillar

asymmetrical porch which wraps around the front and two sides of the lower level; a large first floor bay window on the front facade featuring unique curved glass side windows; a screened in porch on the front facing second story gable with half-round overlap shingle detailing on the triangular facade above the porch; and a novel third story porch which rises out of the hipped roof of the second story and which features a distinctive crowning pyramidal roof. The home features a total of 34 windows of varying shapes, 5 exterior doors, and 3 brick chimneys.

In keeping with the construction of the period, the interior ceilings and baseboards are high and the rooms are large. The most impressive room is the living room which measures 19' x 23'. This room features a large south facing bay window with curved side windows and a window seat which looks out upon the front porch and the Kaw River valley beyond; a huge front door entry from the home's front porch; a distinctive bookcase built into the east wall; and a large mahogany stairway which curves up to the home's second floor. In the library / den to the northwest of the living room, a fireplace is the focal point. It features glazed tile facing with two oak columns to either side and fancy scrollwork on the front of the mantle. Over the mantle is a mirror. Another bay window and window seat is to the west of the fireplace. This room also features a door which opens out onto the first floor porch. The first floor also features a formal dining room with grouped windows and period leaded glass french doors which lead back into the living room. Also on the first floor is a kitchen and a back porch. On the second floor there is a large central hall which connects to two large bedrooms, two smaller bedrooms and a central full bathroom. Two stairways from the first floor connect to the second story central hall. The small bedroom on the southwest corner of the second story features a small, walkout, screened-in porch. All second story woodwork features a bull's eye design on the jambs nearly at the ceiling of each room. Original transoms are over all but one of the upstairs doors in order to let summer breezes blow through. The large bedroom on the northeast corner has a stairway leading to the large third floor attic. In the attic there are steps leading up to a door which opens out to the unique third story porch. This porch provides a commanding view of the valley below.

There have been very few alterations to the home during its lifetime. Photographs from the early 1930's show the home's exterior looking nearly the same as it does today. Several even older photographs thought to date before 1920 do indicate that some minor modifications were made to the exterior before the 1930's photograph was taken. The large front porch was originally screened in. The square posts on the front porch were originally round turned columns. Sometime before 1930 the screens were removed and the turned posts were boxed in giving the porch the appearance that exists to this day. These photographs also show that a modification was made to the walk-out porch on the front face of the second story. Sometime before 1930 the main front facing gable was extended out over this porch and the porch was screened in. Another early modification to the original house was the addition of the kitchen and back porch entryway on the northeast corner. Interviews with Sarah Augusta (Taylor) and Jay Banta indicate that the kitchen and back porch were added in the 1920's. Prior to that, what is now the home's formal dining room was used as the kitchen. Another early modification was the addition of a first floor bathroom on the east side of the house. This addition was accomplished by enclosing a small portion of what was porch space. This addition also occurred prior to 1930's.

The home originally was lighted by gas manufactured on the property. The home was also one of the first in the area to have electric lighting. This was accomplished in the teens through the use of a Delco battery

plant which was housed in a small shed (now used for storing tools) located just north of the house. Heating of the house was done originally by burning coal. This was updated with an oil burning furnace many years ago.

Most of the additions described above were done shortly after Egbert moved into the home in 1920. They altered the home's appearance very little. Very few modifications have been made to the home in the last 60 years. The present owners have performed normal maintenance on the home including painting, reroofing and replacing guttering. The present owners also rebuilt what is known as the home's back porch in the 1980's. This porch was rebuilt to the same dimensions and style as the original which was built in the 1920's and which had fallen into disrepair. (Banta interview, October 28, 1992)

The home today would easily be recognized by either Lewis or Egbert Taylor. It remains an excellent representation of it's original condition. It has been featured in several publications documenting early and historic homes of the area. It was featured in the book **An Album of 19th Century Homes of Shawnee County** on page 32. (Ripley, 1974, p. 32) The home was also the subject of an article which appeared in the December 2, 1979 issue of the Topeka Daily Capital. (A copy of this article appears in the reference section of this nomination.)

The home's distinctive style and its setting high on a hill above the roadway below have long made it a widely recognized area landmark. This was noted as early as 1918 in Lewis Taylor's obituary - "The Taylor farm is one of the well-known places of Shawnee county and is known to all motorists of Topeka." Today, nearly 75 years later, this is still the case. It is very common when describing the location of Oakwood Farm to a new acquaintance to hear the remark, "I've always loved that home and always wonder who lives there whenever I drive by."

There were many outbuildings associated with the farm operation and nursery business which were constructed on the property over the years. These included several barns, a carriage house, a tenant house, various sheds, a detached garage, and the Delco plant building. In the 1930's, the carriage house, whose second floor also had served as housing for hired hands for the nurseries, was moved from its original location just north of the large home to a new site to the southwest of the large home and was renovated into a residence for Sarah Augusta Taylor Banta and her husband Jay. Today the original 1892 home, the renovated carriage house, the farm's main barn and several outbuildings remain on the Oakwood Farm property. The overall setting of the home today has changed little over the years and continues to strongly contribute to the overall character and significance of Oakwood Farm.

OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES

While much has been said about Oakwood Farm's historical significance, it's various owners, and the distinctive farm home, there are also several notable landscape features which are worthy of mention and which could be significant from a historical and/or archeological standpoint. While very little tangible remains today of when Oakwood Farm was the host to the pro-slavery town of Calhoun, (mainly due to road construction

and construction of a motor hotel many years ago) several ties to the days when Calhoun was a part of Oakwood Farm can still be found. It is still possible today to view a quarry site in the western bluff of the farm property where limestone was being mined and cut to be used in the stone work for the Calhoun County courthouse. While the stone courthouse never came to be, many of the cut stones are lying near where they were being removed from the bluff over 130 years ago. In addition, on the southern-most portion of the property near the Kaw River it is still possible to view an old stone jetty which may have been used as a landing point for a ferrying operation at one time.

It has long been said by the Taylors and other early area residents that in one of the pastures north of the home, Oakwood Farm is home to an early Indian burial ground. While none of the present residents know for a fact that this is true or the exact location of the reputed burial ground, it is likely that there is some foundation to the many claims of early owners and other area residents. There has been some tangible evidence of Indian activity on the Oakwood Farm property in the form of arrowheads and spear points which have been found by the property owners through the years.

Also north of the home is yet another significant landscape feature. The northernmost part of Oakwood Farm is a fifty acre field which is one of the last pristine examples of native prairie meadow left in this part of the state. In addition of the flora and fauna which have existed in this natural setting for countless centuries, this meadow is significant in that it is still possible to feel the ruts created by wagon caravans traveling a branch of the Oregon Trail which, according to many early area residents, cut across the field in the 1840's. This field also was used to provide prairie hay for the many horses needed in the operation of the Taylor Nurseries. Jane Banta Abernathy, great-granddaughter of Lewis Taylor and resident of the farm in the 1920's and 1930's, recalled the significance of this part of Oakwood Farm in a letter she wrote to the current owners of the property in 1990:

"Here is the picture of the north pasture at the farm that I took in 1989, from the north boundary looking south across the old hayfield. What memories that piece of prairie holds for me! I can close my eyes and see the men putting up hay: the go-devils, the hay rakes, the cutting machines--all horse-powered, and the clatter of the hay-bailer, which seemed to break down every fifteen minutes. Putting up hay is what we did, where our other neighbors had threshers.

I wonder if the old wagon tracks of the Oregon Trail are still to be seen? And the old buffalo wallow, that was just inside the entrance to the pasture (just north of the woods) off the county line road? My dad tells me that there were two buffalo wallows. Also, I think I know where the Indian burial ground might have been, but I'm not sure." (Abernathy, May 22, 1990)

This area of Oakwood Farm remains a magnificent link to a bygone era. Unfortunately the type of setting presented by this prairie field is a rare and rapidly disappearing land feature in northeast Kansas. It is glimpse into the past worthy of preserving.

The nursery business which was associated with Oakwood Farm property for 71 years ceased operation in 1951. During the height of the nursery and farming business there were several barns, an ice house, a tenant house and a number of other outbuildings on the property. While many of these outbuildings have been

removed, many foundations of the larger structures are still visible, providing an insight into what life was like on Oakwood Farm shortly after the turn of the century. The farm's main barn, detached garage, and the Delco battery plant building, as well as several other outbuildings still exist and are in good condition.

IN SUMMARY

Today Oakwood Farm is a historic property well worthy of preservation. Like many significant properties, the continued historic character and integrity of Oakwood Farm is today endangered. Plans for a complete historical renovation of the home (and possibly some of the outbuildings) as well as future uses of the property are currently being considered by the farm's owners. It is their wish that future use of the property will emphasize and share Oakwood Farm's historic significance and value with others.

From a time dating to days when Indians made the land which would become Oakwood Farm their home, through the Kuykendall and Taylor eras, to the present day, the property has been an integral part of a significant amount of the area's history. The property has been host to Indians, pre-Civil war slavery struggles, and the birth and death of one of the earliest towns in the territory of Kansas. The property has seen births, deaths, grasshoppers, fires, floods and many other notable events. Perhaps most significantly the property was an integral part of development, maturity, and death of a pioneering industry which had a major impact on both the local and national levels.

Today it is still a wonderful experience to sit on the front porch of the beautiful farm home, as Lewis and Egbert Taylor did in bygone days, and take in the magnificent view of the Kansas River and the Kaw Valley that can be seen from the hilltop at the end of Calhoun Bluffs. In such times, one can easily feel the long, varied and rich history that is Oakwood Farm.

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